

At the crossroads: The impact of inter-ethnic tolerance on labor force participation in the  
South Caucasus

Research Thesis

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by

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## **1. Introduction**

I provide an empirical analysis to determine the effects of self-reported levels of tolerance, or inter-ethnic openness, on individual propensity for labor force participation in Eurasia's South Caucasus region. Labor force participation (the sum of those employed and unemployed yet seeking work) is used as an indicator of supply in the labor market model (ILOSTAT) and is vital for understanding factors that constitute a region's potential future supply of labor and human resources.

This analysis uses data from the three countries of the South Caucasus to estimate how inter-ethnic tolerance levels effect propensity for labor force participation across the region. The findings confirm that greater inter-ethnic tolerance at both a professional and personal level lead to a statistically significantly higher propensity for labor force participation. This suggests that inter-ethnic tolerance should be considered as a determinant of labor supply across the region, in addition to other commonly considered determinants of labor force participation such as education.

## **2. Background**

The South Caucasus is a region north of Iran and Turkey and south of Russia made up of three nations: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Each of these countries are classified as transition economies by the World Bank. Each were one of 15 Soviet Socialist republics – the administrative units used to demarcate regions in the Soviet Union. Accordingly, each moved from central planning-based economies in the 1980's to market-based economies upon their independence in 1991.

The South Caucasus is truly at a crossroads. There are more than 40 unique ethnolinguistic groups across the region, over 50 languages from both indigenous language families and the wider Indo-European, Mongolic, Semitic and Turkic language families, the intersection of religion (Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism), in addition to a diversity of geography, history and culture. Over the past millenia, the countries of the South Caucasus have shifted between autonomy and empire, with Ottoman, Persian, Russian and finally Soviet presence all at play in the region. It is not quite Europe and not quite Asia, leading many to call the region a Borderlands – a place of in between, geographically and politically.

Culturally and societally, the South Caucasus is in between as well. The region is known (especially in the West) for conflict and has seen rising trends of nationalism over the past 20 years. While there are many ethnolinguistically unique indigenous groups in the region, these populations are largely in the minority. As a result, representation and cultural and political advocacy for such populations is often difficult.

As a result, when considering the future development of the South Caucasus region, I posit that it is incredibly important to look at tolerance and inter-ethnic openness as social determinants in considering labor market models.

Unemployment rates have been consistently high in Armenia and Georgia for the past 20 years. Georgia's peak unemployment was at 20.71% in 2009, a year after armed conflict with Russia. Armenia's peak was last year in 2020, at 20.21%. Azerbaijan, conversely, reports much lower rates of unemployment overall, with peak unemployment at 6.71% in the year 2000, as given in the 2013 United Nations World Report. It is important to note that

there are reporting concerns connected to state reported data in Azerbaijan. The severity of concern surrounding unemployment is confirmed by preliminary analysis of the data, which I will address shortly. It's found that unemployment has consistently ranked as the highest social issue for both Georgia and Armenia for the past ten years. The data did not have information on Azerbaijan after 2013 but shows that unemployment is the second highest pressing concern for Azerbaijan from 2010 to 2013, after unsolved territorial conflicts. This likely reflects the reality of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – a disputed territory between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which erupted into a military conflict again this past year (2020).

The South Caucasus is also incredibly ethnically diverse (see appendix for ethnolinguistic map). It is a region at the crossroads of historic imperial machinations. The Russian, Ottoman and Persian empires have all had a presence in the South Caucasus over the past millennia up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As reported in Garcés (2014), Armenia is the most ethnically homogenous. The 2001 state census indicates that 98% of the population were Armenian, and the largest ethnolinguistic minority-population groups were Yazidis. Azerbaijan is 90% Azerbaijani, with 15 primary minority-population ethnolinguistic groups, the top three of which are Russian, Lezghi, and Armenian. There used to be a higher population of Armenians in Azerbaijan (in Nagorno-Karabakh and elsewhere), however, many Armenians were deported after the 1991-1994 Nagorno-Karabakh war. Georgia is the most diverse country in the South Caucasus, with ethnolinguistic minority-population groups making up 16% of the population. Those who call themselves ethnically Georgian also can be broken up into four groups, according to the 2002 state census.

Accordingly, I look at the relationship between inter-ethnic tolerance and labor force participation rates across the South Caucasus.

### **3. Data**

I use the 2013 Caucasus Barometer regional dataset, which is a household-level survey covering socio-economic issues and political attitudes across the South Caucasus conducted annually by the Caucasus Research Resource Center. It collects nationally representative data for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. I use the 2013 dataset, as it is the most recent dataset available with cross-country information on all three nations. The survey population includes adults 18 years old and over and does not include populations living in territories affected by military conflict, such as Nagorno-Karabakh (a breakaway state in Azerbaijan), South Ossetia (a conflicted territory at the Georgian-Russian border), Abkhazia (a conflicted territory on the northwest border of Georgia) and Nakhichevan (an exclave of Azerbaijan, bordered by Armenia, Turkey and Iran). The total survey population was 5,953: with 1,832 respondents in Armenia, 1,988 in Azerbaijan, and 2,133 in Georgia. Response rates were 65% in Armenia, 82% in Azerbaijan, and 69% in Georgia.

#### **3.1 Creation of business and personal tolerance indices**

A vital part of this analysis is the measurement of personal and business tolerance. I evaluate tolerance scores using a series of 30 questions given in the survey. The first 15 questions address business tolerance towards 15 different ethnicities<sup>1</sup>. The question used

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<sup>1</sup> 14 ethnic and nationality groups asked about in survey questions: Americans, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Europeans, Georgians, Iranians, Jews, Yazidis, Russians, Turks, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Armenians living in Georgia, Azerbaijanis living in Georgia, Molokans

addresses the openness of a respondent towards someone from their own ethnicity or nationality to do business with someone from another specified ethnicity or nationality. The second 15 questions address personal tolerance. For each of the 15 listed ethnicities, the question asked to determine personal tolerance concerned the openness of a respondent towards a woman from their own ethnicity or nationality marrying someone from a different ethnicity or nationality. The index responses are “Approve”, “Don’t know” and “Disapprove”, which I code as 1, 0, and –1 respectively. As all responses are generated on the same scale, I use an additive index to represent aggregate score of inter-ethnic openness. I add together the business tolerance variables to construct the business tolerance index, and likewise add the personal tolerance variables to construct the personal tolerance index. Finally, I add fourteen to both scores, making the scale positive. This gives two final indices with scores from 0 to 28. A score of zero represents complete disapproval, a score of 14 represents equal approval to disapproval, and a score of 28 represents complete approval.

One concern with the use of an index as the explanatory variable for labor force participation is the ambiguity of an index’s statistical significance. Both tolerance indices are subject to bias underpinning the sub-indicator questions, especially considering that residents of high conflict zones across the South Caucasus were not included in the dataset. Furthermore, while this index is cardinal, its measurement and interpretation remain ordinal. Its differences in values cannot be interpreted in a straightforward way. An increase in score represents an increase in approval, but the magnitude of such an increase is unclear without further social context, which is beyond the scope of this analysis.

### 3.2 Summary Statistics

Figure 1. Tolerance distributions across the South Caucasus.

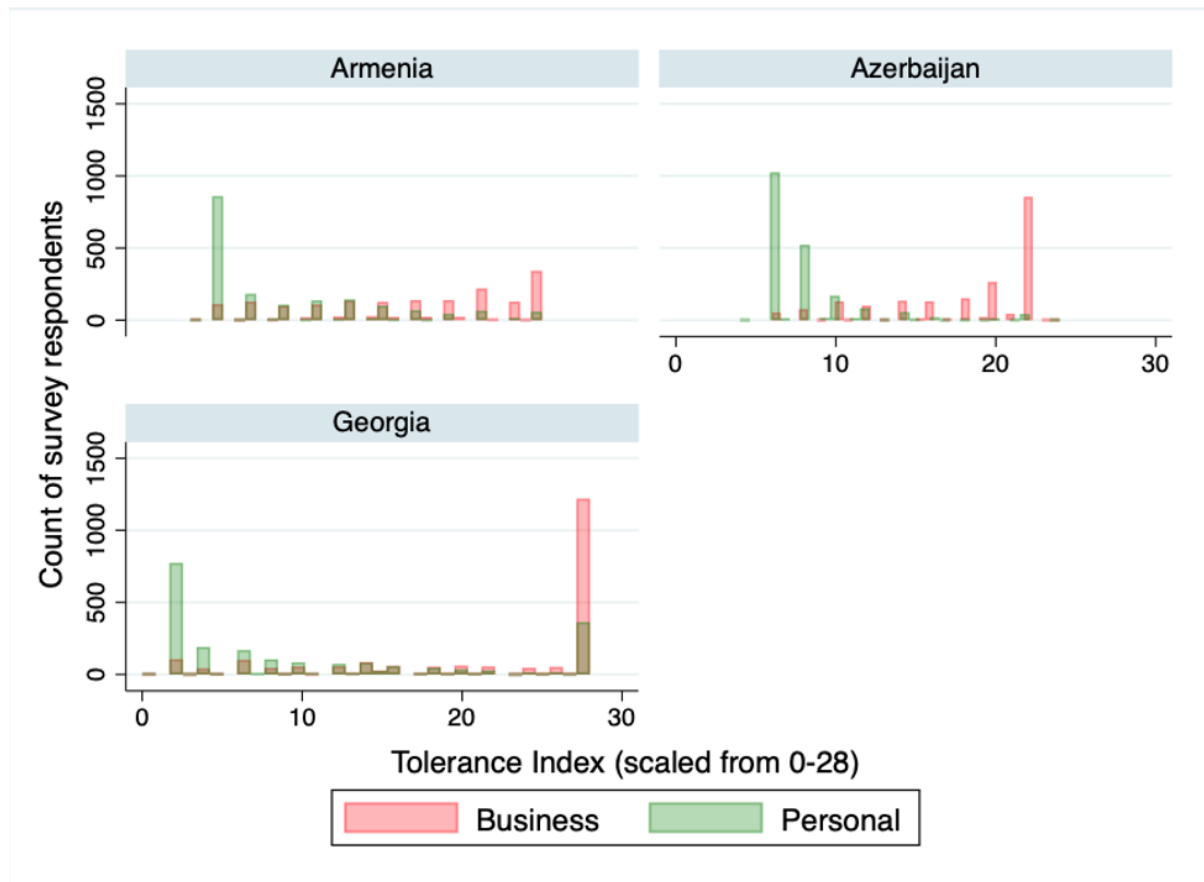


Table 1. Labor force participation and tolerance levels across all three countries.

Armenia		
Labor Force Participation	Mean	Standard Deviation
	.505	.5
Personal Tolerance	9.369	5.618
Business Tolerance	16.695	6.452
Azerbaijan		
Labor Force Participation	.591	.492
Personal Tolerance	8.033	3.291
Business Tolerance	18.108	4.785

## Georgia

Labor Force Participation	.587	.492
Personal Tolerance	10.45	9.746
Business Tolerance	21.663	8.809

As shown in Figure 1, on average across the region, business tolerance is much higher than personal tolerance. We see that this trend holds true when broken down by country. Georgia has the highest average score of business tolerance (21.6) and Armenia has the lowest (16.7). Georgia also has the highest score of personal tolerance on average (10.45), while Azerbaijan's score (8.0) is the lowest.

Comparing these country scores against each other cardinally is complicated without further social, geopolitical and historical context for each nation. For example, one would need to consider the ethnopolitical context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as described in Souleimanov (2013) and its impact on tolerance between Azerbaijani and Armenian communities. While the approval of someone from Azerbaijan towards doing business with someone from Armenia may have the same cardinal value as the approval of someone from Georgia towards doing business with someone from Azerbaijan, the actual significance of these attitudes is not captured in this index. It is likely more accepted and therefore less complicated for an individual from Georgia to hold approval towards someone from Armenia, as compared to similar attitudes from someone from Azerbaijan. As a result, due to the nuances of historical and political context, these indices should not be treated cardinally.

However, it can be noted that on average across all three countries, business tolerance is much higher than personal tolerance. Specifically, mean business tolerance for all three countries is above 14, meaning that on average people approve more than disapprove of doing business with others from different ethnicities or nationalities. Mean personal tolerance, on the other hand, is below 14 for all three countries. This means that on average, people disapprove more than approve of a woman from their own ethnicity or nationality marrying someone else from a different ethnicity or nationality.

Finally, while unemployment rates are high, the average labor force participation rate across the South Caucasus in 2013 (the year of the data for this analysis) was 56.3%, only slightly lower than the OECD average of 60.3% in the same year according to OECD (2021). The relatively high labor force participation rate as compared to high unemployment rates indicates that labor demand, rather than supply, is an issue here. Ahmed (2011) also notes that imperfect matching of skills between the demand and supply sides of the labor market is likely a determinant of high unemployment across the region.

## 4. Methodology

I estimate two models: (1) demonstrating the impact of professional and personal inter-ethnic tolerance on propensity for labor force participation, and (2) showing the effects of social inputs on level of inter-ethnic tolerance at both the professional and personal level.

(1)

$$LaborForceParticipation = \beta_0 + \beta_1 BusinessTolerance + \beta_2 PersonalTolerance + \beta_3 X + u$$

(2)

$$BusinessTolerance = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Education + \beta_2 Exposure to the Internet + \beta_3 X + u$$

$$PersonalTolerance = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Education + \beta_2 Exposure to the Internet + \beta_3 X + u$$

$X$  represents a vector of characteristic controls chosen to prevent omitted variable bias: age, gender, urban, capital or rural settlement type, number of adults in the household, economic situation at home, level of education, ethnicity, and nationality. In both regressions of the second model, level of education is used as an explanatory variable and not a characteristic control. Labor force participation is coded as those who are employed or are unemployed and have looked for work in the past four weeks.

#### 4.2 Discussion of estimation models and empirical assumptions

The first model measuring effects of business and personal tolerance on propensity to participate in the labor force is estimated using logistic regression analysis, as its dependent variable is binary (labor force participation). The measures of business and personal tolerance here are standardized, instead of treated as continuous variables. Accordingly, results indicate a change in labor force participation rate for each additional standard deviation of business or personal tolerance.

The second set of models measuring the effects of education level and exposure to the internet on tolerance levels is estimated using generalized ordinal logistic regression (gologit) (Williams, 2006). As discussed in Williams (2016), both ordinal logistic regression (ologit) and gologit fit models in which the outcome variable is ordinal rather than continuous, such as are the tolerance indices in this analysis. However, ologit models require a parallel regression assumption, which here is violated as demonstrated by the Brant test. The gologit model serves as an alternative to ologit, relaxing the parallel regression assumption for each of the levels of the outcome variable and providing more accurate results. Gologit models estimate separate logistic models for distinct categories of the dependent variable. Here, I break up the personal and tolerance indices into three categories: (1) Approval is greater than disapproval (coded 15-28), (2) approval is equal to disapproval (coded 14), and (3) disapproval is greater than approval (coded 0-13). As a result, the gologit models show the relative odds of education and internet usage dummy variables on whether an individual is in the greater, equal, or lesser approval categories.



## 5. Results

Table 2. Regressing tolerance levels on labor force participation.

VARIABLES	(1) Odds Ratios Standardized Tolerance Levels Only	(2) Odds Ratios Standardized Tolerance Levels	(3) Odds Ratios Standardized Business Tolerance (0-28)	(4) Odds Ratios Standardized Personal Tolerance (0-28)	(5) Odds Ratios Continuous Tolerance Levels (0-28)
Labor force participation					
Business Tolerance	1.177*** (0.0325)	1.079** (0.0401)	1.093** (0.0390)		
Personal Tolerance	1.042 (0.0292)	1.044 (0.0377)		1.066* (0.0369)	
Business Tol. (original indx.)					1.011** (0.00518)
Personal Tol. (original indx.)					1.006 (0.00522)
Constant	1.291*** (0.0339)	0.953 (0.352)	0.979 (0.361)	0.932 (0.344)	0.737 (0.281)
Observations	5,953	5,793	5,793	5,793	5,793
Characteristic Controls	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES

*Business Tol. (original indx.) and Personal Tol. (original indx.) refer to the additive, unstandardized version of the business and personal tolerance indices.*

Standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Results for the first model show that an increase in one standard deviation of business tolerance (an increase in business tolerance score of 7.2) leads to an 17.7% increase in the odds of participating in the labor force when not controlling for demographic characteristics, on average all else equal. When characteristic controls are included, an increase in one standard deviation of business tolerance (an increase in score of 7.2) leads to a 7.9% increase in odds of labor force participation. Personal tolerance is only statistically significant (with a 90% confidence interval) when business tolerance is not included in its regression, with an effect of 6.6% increase in odds for an increase in one standard deviation of personal

tolerance. Increases in both business and personal tolerance have greater effects when not controlling for the other. However, only business tolerance is statistically significant when both variables are included. This could be because personal tolerance has less of an overall effect on labor force participation as compared to business tolerance. Effects of personal tolerance on labor force participation may be captured by the business tolerance variable, but not the other way around.

Table 3. Regressing social inputs on tolerance levels.

VARIABLES	(1) Odds Ratios	(2) Odds Ratios	(3) Odds Ratios	(4) Odds Ratios
	Personal: Disapprove > Approve	Personal: Disapprove = Approve	Business: Disapprove > Approve	Business: Disapprove = Approve
<b>Education</b>				
Reference: less than some secondary				
Some secondary	1.219 (0.167)	0.958 (0.143)	1.381*** (0.146)	1.478*** (0.149)
Secondary degree	1.619*** (0.263)	1.142 (0.198)	0.995 (0.136)	1.071 (0.141)
Some tertiary	1.478*** (0.207)	1.031 (0.155)	1.509*** (0.168)	1.498*** (0.162)
Bachelor's degree	1.410* (0.261)	1.057 (0.207)	1.473** (0.274)	1.617*** (0.286)
Master's degree	1.591** (0.328)	1.246 (0.269)	1.791** (0.426)	2.169*** (0.482)
Doctorate degree	2.119*** (0.589)	1.168 (0.336)	1.349 (0.418)	1.206 (0.352)
<b>Frequency of Internet Usage</b>				
Reference: every day				
At least once a week	0.809* (0.104)	0.849 (0.115)	0.915 (0.117)	0.804* (0.0973)

At least once a month	0.499** (0.143)	0.342*** (0.135)	0.760 (0.182)	0.741 (0.163)
Less often	0.993 (0.154)	0.985 (0.160)	0.789 (0.127)	0.795 (0.121)
Never	0.725*** (0.0764)	0.703*** (0.0789)	0.794** (0.0824)	0.699*** (0.0691)
I don't know what the Internet is	0.615** (0.139)	0.451*** (0.107)	0.313*** (0.0545)	0.266*** (0.0455)
Observations	5,725	5,725	5,725	5,725
Characteristic Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES

Standard errors of odds ratios in parentheses.

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Finally, we look at a generalized ordered logistic regression model, used to estimate the effects of two social inputs (education and exposure to the internet) upon levels of tolerance. To do this, I broke down both the business and personal tolerance indices into three groups: (1) approval is greater than disapproval (meaning the respondent approves of doing business/entering a marriage with more ethnicities or nationalities than they disapprove of), (2) approval is equal to disapproval, and (3) disapproval is greater than approval. Each of these coefficients can be interpreted as odds ratio in comparison to the reference group of approval being greater than disapproval. For education, these results show that having a doctorate degree doubles the odds of greater disapproval of marriage with someone from a different ethnicity or nationality than one's own, as compared to those with less than secondary education, on average all else equal. It's further intriguing to note that higher exposure to the internet similarly leads to higher probability of disapproval on both personal and business tolerance levels. The higher the exposure to the internet, the greater the odds of being more disapproving than those who mark that they do not know what the internet is. A similar trend can be seen for business tolerance.

## 6. Conclusion

Labor force participation is a vital indicator in understanding labor supply across developing regions. I seek to show that understanding the relationship between inter-ethnic tolerance and labor force participation is key in labor market research in the South Caucasus – a highly ethnically diverse region. I estimate the effects of one's own inter-ethnic tolerance levels on propensity for labor force participation at an individual level, hypothesizing that there is a positive effect.

Results confirm this hypothesis. The increase in odds of labor force participation connected to increases in levels of business and personal tolerance demonstrate that inter-ethnic tolerance has a significant effect on propensity for labor force participation across the South Caucasus. Greater tolerance does lead to increased odds of labor force participation across the South Caucasus. These results show that development analysis in the South Caucasus should include this determinant of labor force participation when considering labor supply across the region.

Furthermore, the results of this analysis show that greater education and exposure to the internet result in higher odds of having greater disapproval than approval of those from different ethnicities and nationalities. This trend is true across both business and personal tolerance indices. Education's negative relationship with higher tolerance could be because access to higher education is only accessible to certain communities across the region, leading to increased prevalence of in-groups versus out-groups for each increasing education-level cohort. Next, internet exposure could lead to propensity for lower tolerance depending on how it is used. Further analysis breaking down the relationship between tolerance levels and social media, educational, work, or entertainment use would further illustrate what aspects of internet use cause this negative effect.

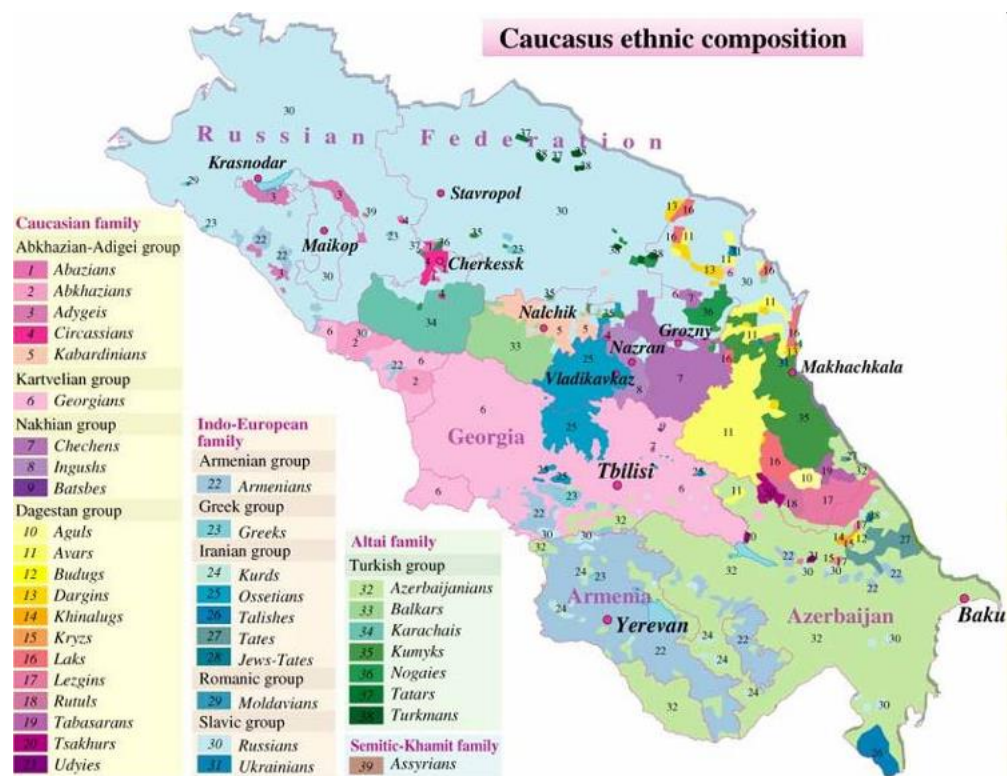
In conclusion, the data is helpful, yet inconclusive for achieving specific policy recommendations concerning promoting inter-ethnic tolerance in the South Caucasus region. The results of this analysis show that inter-ethnic tolerance should be promoted in social policies and business spheres to increase labor force participation across the region. It should also be considered as a determinant of labor supply and individual labor force decision making in development analysis. However, further research needs to be conducted to determine what aspects of education and internet usage, among other determinants, currently decrease tolerance levels.

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## Appendix

Figure 2. Map of the South Caucasus with ethnolinguistic breakdown.



Source: Berouchachvili N., Radvanie J., 1996, 1998. Georgian Soviet Thesaurus

**Table 4. Descriptive statistics averaged across the South Caucasus.**

Variable	Mean	Std.Dev.	Min	Max
Male	.386	.487	0	1
Female	.614	.487	0	1
Respondent's age	46.79	17.667	18	93
Armenia	.308	.462	0	1
Azerbaijan	.334	.472	0	1
Georgia	.358	.48	0	1
Armenian	.331	.47	0	1
Azerbaijani	.338	.473	0	1
Georgian	.303	.459	0	1
Other Caucasian	.014	.117	0	1
Russian	.004	.065	0	1
Kurdish	.003	.052	0	1
Other ethnicity	.007	.083	0	1
Capital	.284	.451	0	1
Urban	.332	.471	0	1
Rural	.384	.486	0	1
Total number of adults per house	2.873	1.304	1	10
Not enough money for food	.282	.45	0	1
Enough money for food only but n	.317	.465	0	1
Enough money for food & clothes	.31	.463	0	1
Enough money for s..	.076	.265	0	1
Enough money for everything need	.015	.123	0	1
Retired	.205	.403	0	1
Student	.028	.166	0	1
Housewife	.176	.38	0	1
Unemployed	.191	.393	0	1
Employee	.257	.437	0	1
Disabled	.017	.13	0	1
Otherwise employed	.004	.059	0	1
Years of Formal Education	11.974	3.03	0	25
LFP	.563	.496	0	1
Personal tolerance	9.31	6.954	0	28
Business tolerance	18.947	7.258	0	28

**Table 5. Descriptive statistics by country.**  
**Armenia**

	mean	sd	min	max
Male	.335	.472	0	1
Female	.665	.472	0	1
Respondent's age	47.139	17.774	18	93
Armenia	1	0	1	1
Azerbaijan	0	0	0	0
Georgia	0	0	0	0
Armenian	.989	.106	0	1
Azerbaijani	.001	.023	0	1
Georgian	0	0	0	0
Other Caucasian ethnicity	.001	.023	0	1
Russian	.004	.066	0	1
Yazidi	.005	.07	0	1
Other ethnicity	.001	.033	0	1
Capital city	.264	.441	0	1
Urban	.371	.483	0	1
Rural	.365	.482	0	1
Total number of adults per house	2.828	1.325	1	8
Not enough money for food	.337	.473	0	1
Enough money for food only	.336	.473	0	1
Enough money for food & clothes	.276	.447	0	1
Enough money for some durables	.041	.199	0	1
Enough money for everything needed	.01	.099	0	1
Retired	.209	.406	0	1
Student	.032	.175	0	1
Housewife	.213	.409	0	1
Unemployed	.158	.365	0	1
Employee	.251	.433	0	1
Disabled	.01	.099	0	1
Otherwise employed	.002	.04	0	1
Years of formal education	11.861	2.977	0	25
Labor Force Participation	.505	.5	0	1
Personal Tolerance	9.369	5.618	3	25
Business Tolerance	16.695	6.452	3	25



## Azerbaijan

	mean	sd	min	max
Male	.438	.496	0	1
Female	.562	.496	0	1
Respondent's age	43.214	16.15	18	93
Armenia	0	0	0	0
Azerbaijan	1	0	1	1
Georgia	0	0	0	0
Armenian	.001	.032	0	1
Azerbaijani	.946	.226	0	1
Georgian	.001	.022	0	1
Other Caucasian ethnicity	.034	.182	0	1
Russian	.002	.045	0	1
Yazidi	.001	.032	0	1
Other ethnicity	.013	.114	0	1
Capital city	.287	.453	0	1
Urban	.393	.489	0	1
Rural	.319	.466	0	1
Total number of adults per house	3.069	1.27	1	10
Not enough money for food	.224	.417	0	1
Enough money for food only	.289	.453	0	1
Enough money for food & clothes	.353	.478	0	1
Enough money for some durables	.121	.327	0	1
Enough money for everything needed	.013	.114	0	1
Retired	.167	.373	0	1
Student	.025	.155	0	1
Housewife	.2	.4	0	1
Unemployed	.194	.396	0	1
Employee	.29	.454	0	1
Disabled	.015	.122	0	1
Otherwise employed	.005	.071	0	1
Years of formal education	11.273	2.673	0	21
Labor Force Participation	.591	.492	0	1
Personal Tolerance	8.033	3.291	4	24
Business Tolerance	18.108	4.785	6	24

## Georgia

	mean	sd	min	max
Male	.383	.486	0	1
Female	.617	.486	0	1
Respondent's age	49.823	18.323	18	89
Armenia	0	0	0	0
Azerbaijan	0	0	0	0
Georgia	1	0	1	1
Armenian	.073	.26	0	1
Azerbaijani	.062	.241	0	1
Georgian	.844	.363	0	1
Other Caucasian ethnicity	.006	.078	0	1
Russian	.006	.078	0	1
Yazidi	.002	.048	0	1
Other ethnicity	.006	.078	0	1
Capital city	.299	.458	0	1
Urban	.241	.428	0	1
Rural	.46	.499	0	1
Total number of adults per house	2.728	1.294	1	9
Not enough money for food	.287	.452	0	1
Enough money for food only	.325	.468	0	1
Enough money for food & clothes	.302	.459	0	1
Enough money for some durables	.065	.246	0	1
Enough money for everything needed	.022	.146	0	1
Retired	.236	.425	0	1
Student	.029	.167	0	1
Housewife	.12	.326	0	1
Unemployed	.217	.412	0	1
Employee	.23	.421	0	1
Disabled	.025	.157	0	1
Otherwise employed	.004	.061	0	1
Years of formal education	12.725	3.214	0	25
Labor Force Participation	.587	.492	0	1
Personal Tolerance	10.45	9.746	0	28
Business Tolerance	21.663	8.809	0	28